

VI.

We encounter the germ of the federal principle in Switzerland during the second half of the thirteenth century. Following the example of the Lombards and a few North German towns, Berne in 1245 concluded an offensive and defensive alliance with Fribourg; with the same aim of reciprocal protection, Fribourg and Morat were combined, as did also Berne and Lucerne. Following the example of these towns, Schwyz and Schwyz formed a league with the other forest cantons, Unterwalden and Uri, and, about 1245-1247, the three entered into an alliance with Lucerne and Zurich. This first coalition of town and country communes was the nucleus of the Confederation. The war of the Swiss Confederation against Austria was begun on May, 1412, when Austria virtually renounced her claims to dominion over Schwyz and Unterwalden and her rights over Lucerne, Zug and Glarus. Of the many contemporary conflicts between peasants and townfolk on the one hand and the feudal nobles on the other, the uprising of the Swiss Independence is the most important. The Swiss Independence is the more remarkable in that the league by which it was sustained was itself but loosely held together. Zurich, Berne and Lucerne, for example, were not directly allied to one another at all, but only indirectly through the league of the Forest States. Yet while the leagues of the German Italian towns and even of the Hanse towns, fell to pieces, the Swiss Federation has endured, having been only temporarily suspended during the wars of the French Revolution and the First Empire.

From their victory at Grandson over Charles the Bold in 1476 to 1516, when a perpetual peace was concluded between Switzerland and France, the former country played a great part in European politics, and her military superiority was generally recognized. At a time when, among other peoples, cavalry still played the chief part in war, the Swiss placed almost exclusive reliance upon their infantry, did it up as their example that led Gonzalo of Cordoba to call them the Spanish foot-soldier. The Swiss infantry was dense and closely compacted lines, in perfect order, the foremost were provided with long pikes, the chief weapon of the Confederates. The various divisions were so arranged as not to get in one another's way until the moment of battle. Their enemies admitted in the Swiss the warlike, valiant and admirable order in which they threw themselves to death, and a heroic courage which preferred death to retreat. Cavalry could do nothing against the impenetrable forest of broken pikes, and, the Swiss van had bridled the enemy's ranks, the halberdiers, with their battle-axes and swords, of the men stationed in the rear proved murderous weapons. Artillery alone could be used against the Swiss, but firing was very slow at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and the Confederates having escaped the effects of the first volley by stopping low, dashed immediately upon the enemy to look them from the enemy's front.

Thus they revived the old legend of the Swiss as the first warriors of the world. Great, however, as was the part which their bravery enabled the Swiss for a time to play, the only lasting advantage gained was the conquest of the cantons of Ticino, the Valtelline and Chiavenna (Clavenna), the possession of which was guaranteed by France to the Confederates in the proposed peace.